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SPIRITUAL ANIMAL

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with

ROBERT BRIDGES' ODES FOR MUSIC

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DISCUSSION

ROBERT BRIDGES AND THE SPIRITUAL ANIMAL

I

GR^{EAT} adulation and some derogation have been accorded to Robert Bridges' philosophical poem *The Testament of Beauty* during the fourteen years since its sensational appearance on October 23, 1929, the laureate's eighty-fifth birthday. Yet, although a score of excellent essays and studies and one provocative book¹ may be selected from multitudes of secondrate reviews and notices, criticism has nowhere passed much beyond impressionistic appraisal or careful exegesis. The time therefore seems ripe for inquiry into the validity of what Bridges had to say.

The Testament of Beauty makes a strong bid for greatness. To wanderers in the Wasteland, this stoutly optimistic poem offers more

¹ Albert Guérard, Jr., *Robert Bridges: A Study in Traditionalism*, Harvard University Press, 1942. Dr. Guérard's volume is noteworthy as the first serious and extended study of the poet. Yet his treatment of the *Testament* and of Bridges' philosophy in general must fall under the category of "careful exegesis", for in writing that "*The Testament of Beauty* is a philosophical poem and the autobiography of a single well-stored mind rather than the geometric exposition of a system; a reasoned commentary on human experience rather than a footnote in the history of epistemology" (page 184), he by implication holds, and in his treatment of his subject obviously follows, the premise that a systematic examination of the consistency of Bridges' philosophy is irrelevant to a determination of the poet's significance. The present discussion departs from the contrary premise and arrives by a different method at a different conclusion.

The first step toward the judgment of a poet as poet must necessarily be to understand him. The finest poetry—such as that of Milton or Wordsworth—satisfies the intellect as well as the heart, or, in so far as it does not, the poem as poem is impaired. The universals of poetry must be intellectual as well as emotional truths. They cannot be true in one sphere and false in the other. Poetry makes its appeal directly to man's soul: good, but of the soul the intelligence is an indispensable part. Poetry is not a fool's paradise. Therefore—and in a reflective poet the point becomes critical—what the poet thinks, or in consistency must think, must be determined before a sound final judgment of him as poet can be made. When the poetry is offered to us both as poetry and as philosophy; when the poet undertakes to convince our reason as well as to move our emotions or stir us through poetic utterance to an intuitive recognition of some great universal; when he offers his poetry as a system of thought and his system of thought as poetry; when the poetry consists in a reasoned philosophy offered to man's heart not merely through his emotions, but also through his intellect; then the poet must be judged as thinker before a final judgment upon him as poet may be made. The intellectual substance must be firm enough to carry the poetry which arises from it.

The problem of judging the philosophical poet as poet will still remain. It will, however, already be partly solved, for our judgment of the poet as a thinker must condition our judgment of him as a poet. If his philosophy fails to provoke the mind, he is a lesser poet even as poet; and if he is a poet at all, he will be a greater one if his philosophy is valid, that is, if its premises are tenable and it is consistent within itself.



than hope: it presents a system of attitudes, thought, and conduct, by means of which man may follow joyously the path to full salvation. The age-old problems of dualism—the dualism between God and man, man and nature, nature and God, body and soul—are resolved in this magnificent synthesis; and the resolution itself strikingly turns upon the scientific naturalism which had so completely removed the underpinnings from orthodox theology and from the philosophy of the Romantic Period. If only it carries conviction, such a message warrants for Bridges a high place among the immortals.

Behind the composition of the *Testament* are nearly seventy years of intermittent philosophic studies. Three of its four books are an elaboration and reinterpretation of the famous allegory of the horses in the *Phaedrus*, but the essential thought of the poem is nearer to the Aristotelian notion of matter striving to manifest itself in form than to Plato's doctrine of ideal archetypes. To Lucretius, whose *De Rerum Natura* was its poetic model, the *Testament* owes much. Nowell Charles Smith suggests that the poet "shows considerable traces of the influence of Leibniz". The letters to Bridges of Gerard Manley Hopkins clearly indicate that Hegel and Darwin were the chief intellectual forces of Bridges' early years. Later the vitalism of Bergson and the idealism of Santayana attracted him. The most useful key to the *Testament* is to be found in the laureate's essay on the latter:

... it requires some attention to dispel the impression that we are dealing with a platonist; ... but whatever inspiration the author may owe to Plato for his particular doctrine of ideas, he recognizes Spinoza and Democritus for his immediate masters, and his philosophy might perhaps be described as a building up of idealism—that is, the supremacy of the imagination—on a naturalistic or materialistic basis. (Essay on George Santayana, *Collected Essays, Papers, &c*, No. XIX.)

And shortly afterwards we read that "this philosophy, as I understand it, is very consonant with my own thought".

II

This union of idealism and naturalism does not clearly emerge as the central problem of the poet's work until after 1900. The redeeming power of beauty is nevertheless the informing spirit of *Shorter Poems*, the sonnet group *The Growth of Love*, the mask *Prometheus the Firegiver*, and Bridges' other early verse. Even his ten highly belletristic dramas, though seldom direct media for his "message", stand as exhibits of his complete dedication to beauty. Yet in the verse of his first sixty years, Bridges' creed is a faith rather than a "system"—a faith composed of two entirely harmonious elements.

The first of these is his profoundly religious conviction of the

spirituality of the universe, a deep and abiding faith in "Eternal Mind" and "Ideals out of being and above". At times the verse sets forth a fairly definite Platonism, again, an uncertain Platonism, and again a pantheism in which all Nature appears invested with spirituality. Some passages indicate subscription to the doctrine of Ideas; others merely suggest a vague and omnipresent divinity. Such confusion, in poetry that springs from faith rather than reason, does not matter. The certain thing is the divinity which, whether it dwells in a mystical sphere of Ideas, or, as an active principle, influences Nature toward ordered and beautiful expression, commands the adoration of man.

The second element in Bridges' early creed is a conviction—equally religious and equally profound—of the spirituality of man. The spirit of man and its salvation is, indeed, the central theme and message of all of Bridges' work. *The Testament of Beauty*, his "De Hominum Natura", as the poet sometimes called it, was the product of fifty years of poetic preoccupation with this theme. In the *Prometheus* of 1882 he had seized upon it:

Nor is there any spirit on Earth astir . . .
 Nobler or dearer than the spirit of man:
 That spirit which lives in each and will not die,
 That wooeth beauty, and for all good things
 Urgeth a voice, or in still passion sigheth,
 And where he loveth draweth the heart with him.

Prometheus himself represents the immortal divinity that dwells in man and brings down the spark from heaven, and, working with the celestial fire, is forever busily engaged in the creation of a newer and more beautiful physical and mental world. How the spirit of man wins through trial to union with heavenly love, with Joy for offspring, is similarly the theme of Bridges' long narrative poem *Eros and Psyche*. The poet's wartime anthology has the Spirit of Man for title and principle of selection. The theme is introduced again and again in the lyrics and the sonnets. For fifty years it almost completely dominates his verse.

Man, then, is a reed flushed with heavenly fire. At once the evidence of his spirituality and identified with it as the defining essence of man is his desire for beauty. Desire, the keyword to all of Bridges' earlier poetry, is man's creative force, the source of all art and of all science, the foundation of all idealism, the means by which he seeks to identify himself with Absolute Love and Truth and Beauty. Thus Psyche's beauty is

. . . transfigured by the spirit forlorn,
 That writeth, to the perfecting of grace,
 Immortal question in a mortal face,
 The vague desire whereunto man is born.

Here, too, is the clue to such lyrics as "A coy inquisitive spirit, the spirit of wonder", "O my vague desires", and the well known "Nightingales", who sing the same divine desire that dwells with saving power in the spirit of man.

But man's capacity to love is as definitely a part of his spirit as the vague desires. Love is the fullest of human experiences, the fulfillment and the justification of man's being. In the play *Achilles in Scyros* it is represented not merely as lyrical passion but as the supreme law by which man must live, superior in its claims to any other demand that may be made upon him. In *The Christian Captives*, a dramatic realization of the doctrine of heavenly affinities, the fate of each human soul is determined by its power to exert an occult spiritual attraction over some other soul chosen by heaven to judge or to redeem it. In the lyrics and sonnets love is the medium whereby man establishes communion with the cosmic spirituality. It is not merely the generative power of the universe, but the force which gives identity to being. It is participation in divinity, the source of all growth and joy. In squaring this doctrine with the predicates of scientific naturalism, Bridges finally evolved the doctrine of BREED of *The Testament of Beauty*.

Reduced to its simplest predicates, this was Bridges' creed in the poetry of his first sixty years. Cosmic divinity woos; the spirit of man, dowered with vague desires and the capacity to love, aspires. Hence art, the creation of man, is more beautiful than Nature, hence TEACHERS, the poets, saints, and seers, because they do most to forward the heavenly plan, are apotheosized, hence music and poetry are God's voice among men. This is poetry—even, if one likes, great poetry—pregnant with possibilities, suffused with a noble and beautiful idealism. But it is a faith, a religion, a creed, rather than a "system" of thought.

III

The challenge of science to Bridges' idealism was its persistent emphasis upon the animal nature of man. The poet's philosophic pursuits, together with a dozen years of medical study and service, compelled him to accept the proposition of man's slow development through a brutal struggle for existence from an origin in primeval slime. How was this to square with the conception of man as a holy spirit? How could the fierceness of the fight for survival be harmonized with the idea of cosmic love?

There could be no intellectual satisfaction in dowering man with divinity at some indeterminable point on the evolutionary scale. To deny, with some evolutionary optimists, the spirituality of man and Nature and yet somehow find in Nature an unaccountable volition full of racial promise was equally impossible. Either Nature

was the medium through which divinity worked, or God and Nature were at strife.

Bridges took the line of the vitalists who find a formative spiritual volition immanent in all Nature, so that God and Nature, Nature and Man, Man and God, become virtually inseparable aspects of the same thing. How can that which is becoming become, unless what it is to become has already been determined? they ask; and their answer, although it may not completely resolve the metaphysical dualism between spirit and matter, provides a working monism in which a sequence of spiritual causes supplements and explains natural causation. The development of man from the lowest organism to the highest degree of spirituality may thus be safely predicated, and the philosophy becomes a "building up of idealism on a naturalistic or materialistic basis". The scientific naturalist need not accept this philosophy, but the exponent of this philosophy may accept scientific naturalism without any sense of contradiction.

Until about 1900 Bridges' position, with its frequent hints of Platonic dualism, is uncertain, but definite immanence seems implied in the two epistles in classical prosody (1903) and in such later poems as "Narcissus" (1913). In the *Testament*, despite the suffusion of the poem with Platonic reminiscences, the doctrine of immanence is clearly set forth. To effect the shift, however, Bridges found it necessary to substitute a vaguer and more confusing conception for that of Plato's archetypal Ideas:

So if we, changing Plato's old difficult term,
should rename his Ideas Influences, ther is none
would miss his meaning nor, by nebulous logic,
wish to refute his doctrin that indeed ther are
eternal Essences that exist in themselves,
supreme efficient causes of the thoughts of men.

—*Testament*, II, 834-39.

The Influences provoke matter toward selfrealization in mind and spirit and

. . . we see Spiritual, Mental and Animal
to be gradations merged together in growth and mix'd
in their gradations . . .

—*Testament*, IV, 558-62.

By this dexterous intellectual legerdemain Bridges succeeded in suffusing immanence with Platonism, and, further, could at will introduce into the compound whatever ideal or material elements in any philosophy happened to prove attractive to him.

IV

But one must look askance at a synthesis got with such ease. In the first place, this resort to a vague and indefinable immanence runs

counter to Bridges' doctrine of man's free will, a doctrine necessary not only to endow the spirit of man with essential dignity but also to make redemption the reward of effort and of merit. Thus, in the *Testament*, Reason stands in the chariot and drives the horses of Selfhood and Breed heavenward. But unless his command is firm and his eyes are constantly fixed upon the Eternal, these impetuous and fiery animals may turn earthward and plunge him forever into darkness. Earlier, as we shall see presently, Bridges had based the symbolism of his mask *Demeter* (1904) with equal clarity upon the principle of man's free will. And in Bridges' poem for C. V. Stanford's little-known oratorio *Eden* (1891) the principle is explicitly avowed.

A doctrine of full immanence, however, even if one grants that God himself is a developing substance, subjects the spirit of man to a divine determinism. A doctrine of partial immanence need not do so; but partial immanence, which may be redefined as participating transcendence, does not resolve the dualism between Nature and Spirit. Now there is little evidence in Bridges' verse that he ever even comprehended this internal inconsistency in his program for man's salvation. As any reader with the patience to scan the *Testament* carefully and identify each relevant verse as implying "full immanence", "partial immanence", or "dualism", or as exhibiting mere obscurity of thought, may readily determine for himself, Bridges constantly wavers between the two doctrines. Apparently he was not even aware of the issue.

V

Bridges' union of naturalism and idealism is also subject to question at another point. With its yearning for beauty, which is truth, the spirit of man is obviously to Bridges something more than mere consciousness. What, then, is its fate at death? In Santayana's philosophy, the spiritual attains to ideal immortality because noble thought, the essence of being, may live on in other minds. Bridges, however, after presenting an elaborate theory of psychology, defends personal immortality as well:

This mind perisheth with this body, unless
the personal coordination of its ideas
hav won to Being higher than animal life,
at thatt point where the Ring [of Reality] cometh upward to reach
the original creativ Energy which is God,
with conscience entering into life everlasting.

—*Testament*, IV, vv. 1262-67.²

² Dr. Guérard (page 189) finds that in these verses the mind achieves a "disinterested and ideal immortality", and also quotes IV, 123-30:

The Ring in its repose is Unity and Being:
Causation and Existence are the motion thereof.
Thru'out all runneth Duty, and the conscience of it

But after death, it would seem that personal ideas could hardly perpetuate themselves without a living brain as a locus for their activity. A miraculous, non-causal spiritual interference with natural law is necessary to establish this personal immortality. Here, certainly, Nature is Other than immanent influence, Other than a full or even a partial manifestation of the spirit of God. Here again, then, Bridges has failed to escape from his dualism.

VI

Yet it is the problem of evil, evil in war and in the struggle for survival, that places Bridges' doctrine under its greatest strain. It is pleasanter to contemplate man's spiritual redemption than his ugly past. Natural selection must, however, be accepted. Thus, under a doctrine of immanence (though not under a doctrine of free will), evil becomes a contingent element in God's own nature. Put in simple terms, to Divinity the end justifies the means.

In "Epistle II: To a Socialist in London" of *Poems in Classical Prosody*, Bridges manages to find in the doctrine of natural selection the justification for his own social conservatism. By way of opening his defense of the social and economic order in which, as a humanist, he himself could so definitely flourish, Bridges presents the old Malthusian argument that the masses of men must always live at the lowest level of subsistence:

... Down down they fall, as a stream on a mountain,
With ceaseless cataract. None hearkeneth; only the silent
Grave, that darkly devours their cry of desperate anguish.
Spare me the story; believe more feel this grief than avow it:
'Tis put aside from thought with death's incurable evil;
Left for them, that assume mankind as cause, to lament it.

The real cause is not man, but natural competition. Among men, too, only the fittest survive. And here begins to emerge the curious

is thatt creativ faculty of animal mind
that, wakening to self-conscience of all Essences,
closeth the full circle, where the spirit of man
escaping from the bondage of physical law
re-entereth eternity by the vision of God.

If these possibly equivocal passages imply a negation of personal immortality, they are the only ones in Bridges that do so; and Dr. Guérard is alone, I believe, in arriving at this interpretation. Compare what Dr. George Washburne Howgate has to say concerning vv. 1263-64 in his *George Santayana* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1938; page 290): "I cannot conceive of Santayana writing lines like these which find a place for immortality." Nowell Charles Smith, on pages 79-80 of his *Notes on the Testament of Beauty* (Oxford University Press, 1931) also reads them as a declaration of personal immortality. Verse 1267, moreover, specifies that it is "with consciousness" that the mind enters into "life everlasting".

Bridges' spelling is followed in these quotations.

doctrine of the elect which lies at the crux of Bridges' faith in redemption through beauty:

What doth it interpret but this, that LIFE LIVETH ON LIFE?
 That the select creatures, who inherit earth's domination,
 Whose happy existence is Nature's intelligent smile,
 Are bloody survivors of a mortal combat, a-tweenwhiles
 Chanting a brief paean for victory on the battlefield?
 Since that of all their kinds most owe their prosperous estate
 Unto the art, whereby they more successfully destroy'd
 Their weaker brethren, more insatiably devour'd them;
 And all fine qualities, their forms pictorial, admired,
 Their symmetries, their grace, beauty, the loveliness of them,
 Were by Murder evolv'd, to 'scape from it or to effect it.

In the *Testament* Bridges adds that through animal parental instinct a selflessness arises from this very SELFHOOD, mounting in man to spiritual emotion. This selfhood, this individualism, the argument runs, is part of man's Life-Force. War, which will exist as long as there is any savagery, whets and sharpens the spirit, and is but one of Nature's processes for the selective pruning of the race. Nature herself will frustrate any attempts at "down-levelling"; the system of inequality which renders it possible for the elect to enjoy the arts and flourish in spirit is an inevitable one. So much for the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

The scheme of things, then, seems to include the damned as well as the elect, and Elisha's chariot, as he rides upward, passes over the body of the charwoman.

VII

Subscription to the spiritual efficiency of selfhood—that is, to God's ruthlessness in the evolutionary scheme—it will at once be seen, does not entirely lay the specter of ill. But Bridges' mask *Demeter*, which deals almost exclusively with the problem of evil, presents by means of philosophical symbolism an implied conclusion which is echoed again and again in the *Testament* and elsewhere. Here the prophet of beauty first affirms the necessity of evil. His argument is the old philosophical one that values exist only by reason of their contraries, that there can be no experience of pleasure without a knowledge of pain, no good without the antithesis by which it is measured and tested. Except, indeed, by the vitalizing shock of its conflict with evil, Good could not exist. Persephone is ever more restored to man, but her perennial freshness lies in the fact that she is bound to the shades.

This argument, however, is accompanied by the presentation of a philosophical paradox which resolves the problem through an emphasis upon man's freedom of volition. Look at the world from one point of view and one perceives

The origin of all things to be evil,
 And the énd evil; that what seems as good
 Is as a bloom of gold that spread thereo'er
 May, by one stroke of the hand,
 Be brush'd away, and leave the ill beneath
 Solid and foul and black . . .

Look at the world from another point of view and one perceives

The origin of all things to be good,
 And the énd good, and that what appears as evil
 Is as a film of dust, that faln thereon,
 May,—at one stroke of the hand,—
 Be brush'd away, and show the good beneath,
 Solid and fair and shining.

So, to the enamoured soul, as Bridges says in the *Testament*, "Evil is irrelevant and will be brush'd aside." The annihilation of evil by man's will is, indeed, one of the major themes of Bridges' poetry from *Prometheus* (1882) to *The Testament of Beauty* (1929).

But in affirming the necessity of evil, the Reality of Good, and the Unreality of Evil, it is questionable whether Bridges has resolved his paradox along rational lines. It can scarcely be doubted that idealism is here in conflict with naturalism, that Bridges assumes the dualism of man and Nature when he treats of the problem of evil, and their monism when he treats of the spiritual development of man.

VIII

When these elements of his philosophy are set side by side, it does not appear that Bridges has succeeded in effecting a working union of naturalism and idealism. Many parts of his creed demand full immanence. Others seem to imply partial immanence. Still others appear lodged in a thorough-going idealism with no discoverable naturalistic basis. The doctrine of immanence does not fit with the doctrine of free will. The doctrine of personal immortality is not a naturalistic one, and the admission of only the elect to the life of the spirit, though perfectly logical, offends the moral sense. The damned, certainly, would not find such a doctrine a satisfactory explanation of their plight, and few generous souls would care to purchase redemption at such a price to their fellows. Evil, moreover—that necessary whetstone for man's spirit—does not really exist. In the closing section of the *Testament*, Bridges himself is compelled to give up exposition and to revert to a declaration of faith.

Under examination, his reconciliation of naturalism and idealism appears as a potpourri, not as an integration, of philosophy. As a poet, he still remains to be judged. Our judgment of him as poet, however, must in part be conditioned by our judgment of him as

thinker. For instance, however highly the poetic ornaments of *The Testament of Beauty* or its disparate passages of poetic beauty may be appraised, the poem as an organic, as a *whole* poem, must fall short.

So summary a statement of the inconsistencies in his philosophy is unjust to the impressively pure and noble spirit of Robert Bridges, but not to implications and interconnections in his thought which he himself failed to realize. His readable dramas, his masterful prose, the beautiful masks *Prometheus* and *Demeter*, a score of perfect shorter poems, and many splendid passages of the *Testament* have permanent poetic value. But Bridges will be esteemed for his lyrical and critical gifts, and for the beauty of certain aspects of his thought, not for the coherence and acceptability of his philosophy.

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BRIDGES' ODES FOR MUSIC

Lover of poetry and lover of music alike will find in Robert Bridges' odes a fascinating problem of interpretation and of artistic form. The poet is now dead eleven years: it is time these two poems were unlocked for critical inspection. The meaning of "A Hymn of Nature" and the "Ode to Music", though neither very difficult nor very hidden, is apparently quite unknown: it has been unperceived because it resides less in the verse than in the subtle relationship of the verse, not to its musical settings by Sir Hubert Parry or by Gustav Holst,* but to a music conceptualized in the odes themselves, a music which still remains, perhaps better so, conceptualized and potential only, in the limbo of art as yet not hypostatized in tangible form.

Seeking their meaning in the verse, or at most in a tangible

*Parry's scores for the two odes may be obtained from Novello, London, and Holst's score for Sections VII and VIII of the "Ode to Music", under the title "A Choral Fantasia", from J. Curwen & Sons, London, England, and Germantown, Philadelphia. Holst's music, though excellent as music, destroys the organic progression of the poem and thus deprives even the sections which the composer so beautifully sets of their philosophical meaning and reduces poetry to the rank of the inferior art. Parry's music is, on the whole, second-rate, and as declamatory throughout as though he had never read Bridges' essay.

Something more than the poet's desire is necessary to effect an entirely harmonious adjustment between the two arts. The musician must, first, thoroughly understand the mood and the ideas of the poem in all of their various interrelationships. He must, further, possess in his own field a power comparable to the poet's in his. Finally, he must be at one with the poet in artistic aim. Holst's music, presenting only a fragment of the poem, falls by the first and third tests, Parry's by all three. That only a poet who is equally a musician (like Campion or Lanier), and will set his own music, can attain to Bridges' ideal, does not necessarily follow: Mendelssohn, Schubert, and many other composers have set short lyrics to music with surpassing skill. But most oratorios and chorales are either greater than the poem around which they are created, or the poem is greater than the music which interprets it. Had Wagner been as much poet as musician, there would perhaps be no need to look further. But on a major scale, at least, a perfect fusion of poetry and music, as of drama and music in that hybrid, opera, appears yet to seek. The force of Bridges' odes, however, does not lie in their actual translation into music, but in a conceptualized music for which translation, though theoretically possible, is adventitious.

music, F. E. Brett Young (in *Robert Bridges: A Critical Study*) wrote in 1913: "It is obvious, too, that the Odes written for Sir Hubert Parry's musical settings have no place in so serious a volume as the *Collected Works*. The inclusion of the octave of that fine sonnet 'Rejoice ye dead, where'er your spirits dwell' only serves to show up the loose construction of the verse that surrounds it. But if the poet has seen fit to leave so many gaps in his expression for the musician to supply, he should not venture to offer us the skeleton as poetry. Unaided by the eloquence of an orchestral setting, a great part of these two odes means very little." His comment indicates the fundamental reason for the neglect of these poems by warier critics, who, despite a vast proliferation of reviews of Bridges' verse, have been so chary of comment upon the odes as to consign them to oblivion by a community of silence. The critics, in short, have possessed no key to their interpretation.

Had they sought one diligently, however, they might have found it in Bridges' essay "The Musical Setting of Poetry", first printed with the "Ode to Music" in 1896, reprinted as No. XXI of *Collected Essays, Papers, & c.* It is a penetrating analysis of the relationship of verse to the music to which it is set. Its intent is to show that, music and poetry being arts that differ in essence, the notion is false that they can be harmoniously blended, without loss to one or the other, by the simple adoption of a declamatory method in music.

The opening paragraphs make it perfectly manifest that Bridges intended his ode as a musical rather than a literary one, and departed from normal poetic form in order to render his verse more supple and pliable under musical exigencies, and more susceptible to heightened musical effects. A clear perception, therefore, that Bridges was aiming, not at autonomous poetry, and not at verse which any ingenious composer, wreaking havoc with the words, might fit to a musical conception of his own, but at verse which should abumbrate a setting, blending perfectly with the music thereof, is indispensable to an understanding of the two odes. For the meaning can be fully realized only through a perception of this peculiar, and in its definitive aspects probably unique, art form. It is not poetry in the ordinary sense of the word, and it is not music, but throws its amphician shadow toward one or the other as idea or as emotion dominates.

Observing that music and poetry are at odds in their laws of repetition, Bridges in his essay shows that a declamatory musical phrase well suited to the verbal phrase must suffer because it cannot be repeated without repeating the words, and this cannot be done without loss both to the words and the music. Further, the musical methods of bringing declamatory movements to a close—repetition or climax—are seldom suited to the poetic movement they are attempting to interpret; the musician must either disregard the poetic rhythm, a palpable fault, or, in following it, sacrifice musical spontaneity and aesthetic beauty; when the verse heightens the emotion, declamation disturbs the delicate poetic balance and at the same time renounces the emotional potentialities

of music; declamation is rendered utterly impotent by the inevitable "bare and ugly words, the weaknesses and unkindnesses of language", which the poet can often triumph over; declamation limits the singing voice to the relatively small number of ordinary speech inflections and thus robs vocal music of its *raison d'être*; and, finally, declamation can do nothing with intricacies of syntax (parentheses, dependent clauses) or diction (polysyllables), and reduces musical words to a "prosaic nakedness". In short, "In a declamatory interpretation of poetry music would seem to abnegate its own excellence for the sake of a quality foreign to itself and repudiated by the art which it is seeking to heighten."

If, then, the marriage of the two arts through declamation is an unholy one, it is obvious that Bridges in his own odes aimed at a sacramental union. Although his essay does not stress the natural corollary that music can be perfectly set only to words "specially contrived for it", he unquestionably recognized this subtle fitness of the verse for musical interpretation as his chief problem in poetic composition. His odes therefore appear as a form of creative work produced by the operation of the poetic faculty and of the musical faculty, adumbrating a hypothetical setting, combined in excited harmony. Just as the Greek ode, with turn, counter-turn, and after-song, was a function of Greek drama, so Bridges, rejecting declamation, conceived and designed the ode as a function of the modern chorus and orchestra.

This conception, although the difference is merely one of degree, involves a much larger and more complicated problem than that of the short lyric which sings itself into a tune. If we set this aside, the natural song, it would appear that in the musical ode Bridges has produced an art form unique in English literature. Perhaps the nearest approach to it is Lanier's cantata "The Centennial Meditation of Columbia". Compared with Bridges' odes, however, this is on a minor scale; neither does an analysis of the poem nor a perusal of Lanier's essays in prosody indicate that he had progressed very far in Bridges' direction. As for the choral odes of the neo-classical period—such as Dryden's "Alexander's Feast", Pope's "Ode for Music on St. Cecilia's Day", and Collins' "The Passions"—they are inspired by a conception almost antithetical to that of Bridges. Odes for music they are indeed, but not, in this special sense, musical odes. Rhetoric dominates in them. They cry for declamation, and musical setting is at best an added rhetorical ornament. Throughout the genre music is a strictly subservient, a decorative art, without any vitality proper to itself. The poems celebrate the power of music, but reduce music to slavery. To Bridges as a musician, nothing could be more offensive. In his endeavor to preserve for the music its power of beauty in musical phrase and movement without sacrifice of poetic beauty, his experiment acquires a bright novelty of its own. His odes were conceived in music and exist in music; and only through conceptualizing the music implicit in the verse can we arrive at a full understanding of their meaning.

Let us think, then, of the odes as a functional part of a choral

symphony with varying movements. For once their artistic purpose has been perceived, the difficulty criticism has encountered in determining their philosophic import almost wholly disappears. Desiring the definiteness of poetry less than the emotional power of music, Bridges has placed upon the conceptualized music the burden of developing and enforcing the verbal theme. If, therefore, each section, each verse of the odes is conceived of as inflected by means of the superb diversity of music, we shall find in this conceptualized inflection the emphasis which will reveal their meaning.

An inventive reader, whether a lover of poetry, of music, or of both, fetching Bridges' *Poetical Works* from a library shelf, may derive an hour's pleasure from sketching a choral and orchestral outline of either poem. The following hints toward the poetical and musical interpretation of the "Ode to Music" are of course subject to challenge, especially in detail, but they may at least suggest a critical method which will remove from the ode its cloud of obscurity and afford a clue to the solution of a problem in poetry and music full of delight and interest. Once the "Ode to Music" is sensed as a progression of major musical movements, its form and meaning begin to manifest themselves. In this poem appear four major movements, corresponding to the four movements of a symphony; these are (it may be hazarded) an *allegretto* (first three sections), a *maestoso* (Sections IV and V), an *adagio* (Sections VI and VII), and an *allegro con brio* (last three sections).

The first division of the "first movement", a spirited introduction beginning

Myriad-voiced Queen, Enchantress of the air,
Bride of the life of man! With tuneful reed,
With string and horn and high-adoring quire
Thy welcome we prepare. . .

praises the ravishing mystery of music and her power of expressing the spiritual aspirations of man (his "vague desires"), and invokes her return to England. (**Forte opening, Chorus and full orchestra, with a choral climax.**) The second section of the first movement tempts her return with recollections of wildwood delights in the days of "merry England" (**horn**), and with a coaxing poetic description

There the birds with tiny art
Earth's immemorial cradle-tune
Warble at dawn to fern and fawn

of English bird-songs and flowering season. (**Flute and reeds, light brilliance.**) The third section, echoing Milton's minor verse, suggests the close relationship of poetry and music in the seventeenth century, and brings the first movement, in contrast with the *eclat* of the opening passage, to a conclusion in subdued music. (**Soli, violins followed by low strings, bells, double piano.**)

For the "second movement", a more positive and dynamic music

must be conceived; in the orchestral setting the gentle music of strings and flutes gives way to that of the brasses and percussion. For the fourth section of the ode, beginning the second, or *maestoso* movement, celebrates the triumph of man's mind and spirit over the sea

The sea with melancholy war
Moateth about our castled shore;
His world-wide elemental moan
Girdeth our lives with tragic zone.

He, ere men dared his watery path,
Fenced them aloof in wrath:
Their jealous brotherhoods
Sund'ring with bitter floods:
Till science grew and skill,
And their adventurous will
Challenged his boundaries, and went free
To know the round world, and the sea
From midday night to midnight sun
Binding all nations into one.

(trombones, tympani, deep brasses to high brasses, trumpets) and celebrates especially the dauntless courage of the sea-farers who have flung the British empire around the world:

Yet shall his storm and mastering wave
Assure the empire to the brave;
And to his billowy bass belongs
The music of our patriot songs,
When to the wind his ridges go
In furious following, careering a-row,
Lasht with hail and withering snow:
And ever undaunted hearts outride
His rushing waters wide.

(bassoon or trombone, hint of 'Rule, Britannia,' deep brasses, low strings, drums, *accelerando*, double *forte*.)

This patriotic interpretation of man's conquest of Nature is followed by a description of the sea at calm, and of Peace and Love over England. (*Andante*, violins, cellos, light percussion.) The concluding stanza of Section IV forms a natural musical transition to Section V, a passage of philosophic beauty and profundity, in which the triumph over evil of a Shelleyan brotherhood of man dominated by love is prophesied. As always in Bridges, the spiritual nature of man, whose definitive essence is his "desire" (the key word in Bridges' verse) to realize beauty, is affirmed: this ever-developing spirit will re-create the world. (*Repetition of a passionate melodic theme as the different choral voices call to one another.*)

The "second movement" having thus interpreted the poetic themes of the triumph of man and the glorious vision of the world to be, the "third movement", in natural musical and emotional contrasts, introduces a more somber strain. Lament for the absence of music in Eng-

land since the death of Purcell (**heavy strings and vocal counterpoint**) passes gradually into a more general lament for man in distress; and in Section VII poetry and music begin to reckon with the problem of evil. A dirge (**minors**) is sung:

Man born of desire
Cometh out of the night,
A wandering spark of fire,
A lonely word of eternal thought
Echoing in chance and forgot.

In his love of nature, the dirge continues, his search for truth, his struggle with evil, and his vision of beauty

He dreameth of beauty
He seeks to create
Fairer and fairer
To vanquish his Fate;
No hindrance he—
No curse will brook,
He maketh a law
No ill shall be

(**adagio, minors, musical contrasts and basses prominent in the chorus, opportunity for effective soli**) man appears as a "spark of fire", but it is an ephemeral spark, as the sober refrain thrice insists:

Then he hideth his face;—
Whence he came to pass away
Where all is forgot,
Unmade—lost for aye
With the things that are not.

With Section VIII, which introduces with another sharp contrast the "fourth" and final major movement of the ode, the theme of man's mortality so somberly set forth in the dirge gives way, with a sudden resurgence of spirit, to a paean of praise (**choir in unison, vigorous music**), a reaffirmation of faith in which the poet joyously asserts the immortality of the poets, artists, saints, and seers who, forwarding the uncompleted heavenly plan, better the world in beauty and love:

Rejoice, ye dead, where'er your spirits dwell
Rejoice that yet on earth your fame is bright,
And that your names, remember'd day and night,
Live on the lips of those who love you well.
'Tis ye that conquer'd have the powers of Hell
Each with the special grace of your delight;
Ye are the world's creators, and by might
Alone of Heavenly love ye did excel.

Now ye are starry names
Behind the sun ye climb
To light the glooms of Time
With deathless flames.

The ninth section, again apostrophising Music ("Open for me the gates of delight") and continuing the contrast with the dirge, celebrates the immortal fruit of beauty which the names of love, the world's creators, have given as a dower to the spirit of man, celebrates too the beauty of Nature, the triumph of the principle of beauty over death, and the power of music to afford access to the spiritual world. Music is thus seen as one of the chief avenues of the artistic beauty by which man attains to spiritual redemption. The music gradually builds toward the final climax in Section X, where Music is again entreated to return

Thy myriad-voiced loveliness go forth
to lead o'er all the world's wide ways
God's everlasting praise,
And every heart inspire
With the joy of man in the beauty of Love's desire.

in order to fulfill her major role in man's triumph over ill through beauty. (Symphony and chorus in unison.)

The same sense for choral and symphonic movements, the same intent that music should carry half of the burden of expressing the poetic theme, the same basic idea that the philosophy of the poem should be inflected and revealed through the emotional power of a conceptualized music, is manifested in "A Hymn of Nature". Section I phrases the mystery of the universe and stresses its regulation by aesthetic and moral laws; II presents the great philosophical question raised by the destructive power of nature that consigns all her creations to ultimate death. This opening of brilliant and mighty mystery and the sequent darker and more tragic passage offer the richest opportunities for choral and orchestral interpretation. These two divisions are followed by a movement of contemplative loveliness, in which the rectifying element and solution to the riddle, man's "vague desires", is seen as a part of the creative force of nature ever manifesting herself in limitless beauty. IV finds the meaning of man's existence in the joyous creative labor with which he forwards God's design, and develops the themes of his divine unrest and toiling aspiration. Through his insatiable thirst for beauty (symbolized by the nightingale's song in V), man has slowly won upward to a vision of a divine order. His conquest over ill rises out of his instincts for beauty, and the movement swells into a soaring vision of the fulfillment of man's holiest dreams. VI is an emotional interpretation, stressing the divinity of love, the overpowering beauty of the vision. This passage of tender music leads to the concluding noble hymn of man's strength and growing divinity, of his spiritual emancipation through his instincts for beauty and through joyous endeavor.

Far from being barren of meaning, then, these two odes not merely epitomize the poet's philosophy but set it to music. They celebrate the same triumphing spirit of man which Bridges made the theme of his mask Prometheus The Fire-Giver; the same "vague desires", restless

stirrings, indefinable impulses, throes of the heart, visions and unquiet dreams, in which "Nightingales" and many another of Bridges' lyrics and sonnets have their origin; the same conquest of evil through man's power to choose courage, love, and beauty which forms the theme of the mask **Demeter**; the same idealization of the arts and the same adulation of the poets, saints, and seers, which finds reiterated expression in the sonnet sequence **The Growth of Love** and in Bridges' shorter poems; the same creation of a spiritual order through love and beauty, the same aesthetic redemption, which is the central doctrine of **The Testament of Beauty** and the core of all of Bridges' poetic work. The attentive reader willing to conceptualize the music implicit in the verse, and thus to supply the emotional emphasis that music would give to the varying movements of the odes, will find in these choral poems the concentrated essence of Bridges' philosophy. Here, too, perhaps, he may find the finest expression of that philosophy, for in conceptualizing it and in demanding of the reader its translation into musical terms, Bridges has created the symphonic or choral poem as distinguished from verse which can be "set" to music, a unique genre with a fascinating and peculiar beauty of its own.

